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SUBJECT: LIBERALS CLARIFY AFGHANISTAN NO TRIGGER FOR
ELECTIONS

REF: A. OTTAWA 270

[1](#)B. OTTAWA 257

[1](#)1. (U) In remarks to reporters in Winnipeg on February 22, Liberal Party leader Stephane Dion explicitly stated that his party "prefers" that the future mission of Canadian Forces in Afghanistan not be the trigger for a federal election. He indicated that the Liberals welcome the debate on the government's revised motion (ref a), which will begin on February 25, and noted that this was "inevitable" in a democracy. He underscored that Canada was, after all, fighting on behalf of Afghanistan's right to be a similar democracy. Dion commented on the "great progress" by the government's "move toward our position" with the new motion, although he said the Liberals would question why the government had moved the Liberals' original end date of February 2011 (with completion by July) to July 2011 (with completion by December). He emphasized that the Liberals, as well as "99.999 percent of all Canadians" fully support Canadian troops. In response to a final question about Liberal hopes for an eventual federal election, he noted that the Liberals will "choose our time, and then be ready."

[1](#)2. (U) Separately, Chief of Defence Staff General Rick Hiller, at a Conference of Defence Associations Institute seminar on February 22 in Ottawa, called on Canadian politicians of all stripes to convey their "clarity of purpose...and overwhelming support" to Canadian troops in Afghanistan. He argued that parliamentarians should recognize that often the best way for members of the Canadian Forces to defend themselves is by engaging in "pro-active operations" against enemy combatants. He commented that failure to do so would serve as a signal to the Taliban that they could shape Canada's political decisions by targeting Canadian forces in Kandahar, adding that he could not rule out that the Taliban had decided to step up the pace of recent attacks with an eye on this ongoing debate.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Comment: If there have been any lingering doubts in recent weeks that the Liberals intend to let the government survive for the time being and that the two major parties have reached a workable consensus on Afghanistan that will enable the continued deployment of Canadian Forces in Kandahar until sometime in 2011, Dion has now clearly laid these to rest. He failed even to cite the usual litany of minimal requirements for an extension beyond February 2009 -- 1,000 more troops from NATO partners and sufficient helicopters and UAVs.

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